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SUBJECT: ITALY-MIDDLE EAST: DAS GRAY DISCUSSES IRAN,
ANNAPOLIS, WESTERN SAHARA WITH GOI'S RAGAGLINI AND CARNELOS

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Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Jonathan Cohen for reasons 1.4 b and d.

Summary

11. (C) NEA DAS Gordon Gray exchanged views on Iran and discussed the Annapolis conference with PM Diplomatic Advisor on the Middle East Marco Carnelos on November 15 in Rome. Gray emphasized the unwavering U.S. commitment to prevent a nuclear Iran. Carnelos said Italy was committed to encouraging wide Arab participation at Annapolis and that Italy hoped the conference would deliver concrete results for PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

12. (C) Gray also met with MFA Director General for the Mediterranean and Middle East Cesare Ragaglini to discuss the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), the November 13 Italy-Algeria Summit, Western Sahara and Libya. Ragaglini noted that Italy was pressing Spain to contribute to the MFO and thanked Gray for the U.S.'s leadership role in the MFO. Ragaglini reported that the Italy-Algeria summit had been productive, focusing on energy. He was not optimistic on the Western Sahara but shared Gray's assessment of the Moroccan proposal as an important step forward. On Libya Ragaglini expressed his frustration with Colonel Qadhafi's intransigence. End Summary.

MFO: Italy Optimistic Spain will Contribute

13. (C) MFA DG Ragaglini opened his November 14 meeting with NEA DAS Gray by thanking the U.S. for its continued high-level support for the MFO. Ragaglini and Gray both agreed that the MFO needed additional funding more than additional troops. Ragalini reported that FM D'Alema had personally encouraged Spanish FM Moratinos to contribute and that Italy was optimistic that Spain would do so.

IRAN: U.S. Commitment Unwavering

14. (C) In his meeting November 15 meeting with the PM's Advisor on the Middle East, Marco Carnelos, Gray underscored

that U.S. commitment on the Iranian question would remain steady regardless of the upcoming U.S. elections. Gray noted it was unfortunate that Iran appeared unwilling to play a more constructive role in the region, putting aside its past, especially in light of the removal of two of Iran's largest headaches (Saddam and the Taliban). Iran could have reacted with cooperation, but instead had chosen confrontation. Gray encouraged Italy to support further UNSC action and autonomous EU sanctions on Iran.

15. (C) Carnelos cautioned that the West should not ignore the impact of the current turmoil in Pakistan on Iran. We tend, he said, to see Pakistan as an actor in Afghanistan, but from the Iranian perspective, Shiite Iran is a potential target for Pakistan and would be the first target of an al-Qaeda nuclear weapon. Carnelos said Italy agreed with U.S. assessments that Iran is supporting the Taliban. However, he argued that this was a 'tactical,' not a 'strategic' shift on Iran's part. What Iran was doing, he argued, was intended to show that they could use their enemies to hurt the West. It was not, he opined, an indication of a larger strategic relationship between the Taliban and Iran.

ANNAPOLIS: Italy Encouraging Arab Attendance

16. (C) Gray told Carnelos that the Secretary was encouraged by progress she had seen by the Israelis and Palestinians and that Annapolis would not be the end of a process, but the beginning. Annapolis would be followed by the December Paris Donors Conference at which Gray encouraged Italy, along with its European allies and Gulf countries, to make a significant contribution.

17. (C) Carnelos stressed the need for the conference to have real content and not just list the final status problems. For it to be a success, he said, PA President Mahmoud Abbas,

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much more than Israeli PM Olmert, must be able to walk away with a clear, concrete deliverable. The key would be how Abbas was perceived afterwards. Carnelos said Italy would do what it could to encourage Arab participation and was telling Arab leaders not to undermine its potential with negative comments before the event. He noted that the Saudi King, when asked by Prodi if he would attend, gave a negative impression.

Positive Italy-Algeria Summit; Pessimistic on W. Sahara

18. (C) Ragaglini briefed Gray on Italy's November 14 Summit with Algeria. The focus was on energy, but talks also touched on the Western Sahara, cooperation against international terrorism, infrastructure, clandestine immigration and Italian business opportunities. President Bouteflika led his delegation and was accompanied by his ministers of foreign affairs, defense, finance, interior, trade and energy. Carnelos told Gray in a separate meeting that PM Prodi had discussed creating a financial facility for small and medium size enterprises open to the Mediterranean region with a special focus on North Africa.

19. (C) Gray said the U.S. was encouraged by the passage of UNSCR 1754 on the Western Sahara and that the U.S. had worked hard with Morocco to produce a serious plan. The resolution echoed the U.S. assessment of Morocco's plan as serious and credible. Gray said the U.S. would push both sides to continue negotiations without preconditions. There is substance to the Moroccan plan, he said, which should be explored and the U.S. is encouraging Morocco to accept a date for a third round of negotiations

110. (C) Ragaglini, who participated in FM D'Alema's meeting with Algerian FM Mourad Medelci, said D'Alema had, despite

Italy's long history of support for the Polisario, stressed to his Algerian counterpart that the Moroccan proposal was the first new proposal on the table in over thirty years and deserved serious consideration. The fundamental problem, explained Ragaglini, was that the proposal was Moroccan. It would have been received better by Algeria if it had been proposed by a third party.

¶11. (C) Ragaglini noted that the Western Sahara issue is complex and would not be resolved in the near future. The "core" of the problem was the lack of trust between the parties. He strongly agreed with Gray's suggestion that that it might be a generational problem and might not be resolved until Bouteflika was succeeded. Ragaglini lamented that the issue was like a rock in the middle of the development of the Maghreb, and that once resolved the whole region would benefit greatly.

LIBYA: Italy's Relations Remain "Strained"

¶12. (C) Ragaglini reported that D'Alema's November 10 meeting with Col. Qadhafi had been disappointing. Italy and Libya had been negotiating a friendship treaty to finally close the difficult chapters of the past, but the Libyans consistently thwarted the process in its final stage by making unreasonable requests. Ragaglini said Italy had been negotiating with the Libyan Ambassador in Rome and with Amb. Obeidi, but that neither seemed "capable of delivering." He said only Libyan Intel Chief Musa Kusa could deliver in Qadhafi's place.

¶13. (C) Gray noted that the U.S. had told the Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister during his recent visit that when Libya takes its seat in the UNSC in January it will be an opportunity to show that Libya is a responsible member of the international community.

U.S. Arms Sales to Gulf

¶14. (C) Gray told Ragaglini that the State Department had informally notified Congress on November 13 on proposed arms sales to the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. While there may be some concern in Congress over the sale to Saudi Arabia, Gray said the State Department expected the sale to go

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through especially given the heightened threat to Saudi Arabia from a more assertive Iran.

¶15. (U) DAS Gray cleared this cable.

¶16. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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